Parental Corporal Punishment and Childrens’ Academic Success

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There have been several studies of corporal punishment and its effects on children. However, very few studies have examined how corporal punishment affects academic success in children. Corporal punishment is defined as physical punishment i.e spanking. It can have a lasting effect on a child and is associated with more behavioral problems and poorer mental health. According to [children.org](http://children.org) in the 1993-1994 school year about 470,000 children were subjected to corporal punishment in school. “The American Academy of Pediatrics believes that corporal punishment can actually have a negative influence upon a child's self-image and thus interfere with his academic achievement,” (Corporal Punishment, 2013). Academic achievement determines many life opportunities, it is important to focus on ending this cycle and putting a stop to corporal punishment. Finding the link between corporal punishment and academic success is important. Many studies such as this one show a negative affect on the child, and give ideas for stopping the use of corporal punishment. However, this study gathers feedback from both the parent and the child on the use of corporal punishment and academic achievements.

The style of parenting is a determinate of the type of discipline used within a family. *The Relationship Between Parental Control and Students’ Academic Achievement in Social Studies* (Fan, 2010) describes the association between parental control and children’s academic success. This article examines three parenting styles, authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive (Baumrind, 1991). Authoritative is characterized by high warmth, rational punishments and open communication with the child. Authoritarian is characterized by less warmth and high control. Permissive is characterized by a lack of control and demands but high warmth. Fan states; “promoting conformity, enriching the child’s home environment and encouraging independence, enhance high academic achievement in children,” (2010, p. 83). The stability in home helps children succeed in life. High levels of warmth, appropriate demands, and open communication with a child help them to be successful in many areas of their lives.

Along with parenting style, the home environment is a big determinant of children's developmental outcomes. Bradley, Corwyn, Burchinal, McAdoo and Coll (2001) examined how children’s ethnicity, social status, maternal responsiveness, and the use of corporal punishment effected children’s motor and social development, vocabulary development, achievement, and behavior problems associated with these factors. Data was gathered through home environment assessments, a child behavior problem index, and indicators or poverty status. The sample was American families with children birth to 13 years. The findings showed that the home factors had a greater impact on the younger children. There was also a strong connection between specific factors such as learning stimulation and children's developmental status.

Many studies focus on negative effects of corporal punishment on young children.

Mulvaney and Merbert (2010) examined the negative effects parental corporal punishment has on the mental health of older adolescents. It was hypothesized that the use of corporal punishment would be associated with poorer mental health. Furthermore, there would be a negative impact on parent-child relationships in those adolescents who disapproved of the use of corporal punishment. The study involved 230 adolescents who completed measures of the frequency and degree of corporal punishment by each parent, parenting styles, adolescent’s attitudes on corporal punishment, adolescent depression and self-esteem. This study showed corporal punishment can induce stress for many children. However, the affects from corporal punishment were strongly related to the child’s attitudes toward this type of discipline and toward each parent’s use of corporal punishment. If the child disagreed with the use of corporal punishment the affects on their mental health was much greater.

In another study Mahoney, Donnelly, Lewis, and Maynard (2000) investigated the frequency of mother and father self-reports of corporal punishment, in order to determine norms within clinically referred families. They also examined physical aggression and its relationship with several demographic risk factors, as well as children's’ externalizing behavior problems associated with parental physical aggression. The study involved 390 families with children between 2-17 years of age that had several demographic risk factors, such as low family income and a single parent household. These children had also been clinic referred for a series of behavioral problems such as ADHD and mood/anxiety disorder. Parents whose children are referred to mental health services were more likely to report using corporal punishment. It is important for clinicians to be sensitive to the fact that these parents are more likely to use corporal punishment and physical aggression, in order to avoid escalating dangerous situations for the children.

Children need discipline but not to the extent that it has detrimental effects on their

lives and thought processes. Smith and Mosby (2003) focus on the use of harsh corporal punishment on Jamaican children and adolescents in relation to aggression, depression, academic failure, and socio-emotional dysfunction. The author also provides recommendations for stopping the use of excessive discipline and acknowledges that it will take much cooperation from the government and policy makers to change these family practices. Many times the punishment is not consistent or developmentally appropriate and therefore may cause long term damage to the child.

Another study by Simon, Johnson and Conger (1994) examined the impact that harsh

corporal punishment and parental involvement have on early adolescents’ aggressiveness, delinquency and psychological well-being. The sample was 451 two parent families with seventh grade students in a longitudinal study (three years) of 332 adolescents to further examine the effects of corporal punishment and quality of parental involvement. Self-reports of the adolescents and parents were also used and combined. The results showed that parents usually reported lower frequency of the use of corporal punishment than their children did. It did show that the majority of adolescents experienced corporal punishment during the study. Also, there was not a dramatic difference in the use of corporal punishment between the mothers and fathers in the study. Family income and parents’ education seemed to have a significant effect on whether corporal punishment was used or not.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between parental corporal

punishment and academic success. This study will be focused on academic outcomes. It will use self-reports of both parents and adolescents. This is to determine how the two are related and to develop a solution for this problem. The hypothesis of this study is that there is a negative relationship between the use of corporal punishment and children’s academic performance.

**Methods**

**Overview**

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between parental corporal punishment and academic success. A correlational study design was chosen to examine the relationship between the two. The predictor variable was whether or not parental corporal punishment was used as a form of discipline in the household and the outcome variable was academic success, whether the children performed well in school or not. Both variables were measured quantitatively and scores were obtained providing ordinal levels of measurement. This is the most effective way to gather information on corporal punishment used within the homes. **Procedures**

Prior to data collection, the Institutional Review Board at California State University, Chico approved the proposal. A request was sent to schools in Northern California to recruit participants for a study on the effects of corporal punishment on a child’s academic performance. This included an overview of the study and its goals, the time requirement and described how it would be administered. Five schools agreed to participate. Letters were then sent home further explaining the goals and procedures of the study. The parents were informed that confidentiality would be kept and that they can refuse to continually participate at any time during the study. Parents that agreed to participate signed consent forms. The children and parents were told before the questionnaire was administered that they could stop at any time during the process. Child assent was obtained at the beginning of the questionnaire. The children and parents took answered a questionnaire. No names were taken to insure confidentiality and completed questionnaires were immediately placed in an envelope. No know risks were involved and no incentives were provided to participants.

**Participants**

The study included a non-probability sample of 100 families located in Northern California with adolescent ages 10 to 18 years old; the mean age is 16 years old. The parents’ ages were 30 to 60 with a mean age of 40. This sample was used given the budget constraints of the researcher. There will be 50 females and 50 males. Of the sample, 25 families were Caucasian, 25 were African- American, 25 were Hispanic and 25 were of other decent.

**Materials**

The researchers designed two separate questionnaires, one for the parents and one for the adolescents, each questionnaire contained ten measures. The measures were written and self-administered. The measure included five questions regarding corporal punishment and five questions related to academic success of the adolescents. The corporal punishment section included questions about how often corporal punishment was used as form of discipline in the household. This measure is a Likert-type scale response. Sample items of this included “How often was spanking used in your household as a form of discipline.” Anchors for this measure included, 0=*never*, 1=*rarely*, 2=*sometimes*, 3=*often*, 4=*always*. The academic section included questions about performance in school, and average grades. Sample items include, “I normally receive A’s on tests.” measures through agree or disagree with the statement. Higher scores for the measures indicate the use of corporal punishment has a negative impact on children's performance in school.

**Data Analysis Plan**

The research hypothesized there will be a negative relationship between the use of corporal punishment and children's academic performance. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient statistic was used to measure the relationship between the two variables.

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Dear Parent,

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of parental corporal punishment on a child’s academic success. The reason for conducting this study is to find a relationship between corporal punishment and children’s academic achievement.

Your expected time commitment for this study is about 2 to 4 hours. You and your child will be asked to self-report the use of corporal punishment in your home, how often it is used and to what degree. You and your child will also be asked about school performance and attendance. A researcher will administer this to you and your child in your home.

The risks of this study are minimal. These risks are similar to those you experience in normal daily life. The topics in the survey may upset some respondents. You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may end your involvement at any time if you choose without penalties or negative consequences. Any information gained from this questionnaire will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will have access to your consent form and information you provide in the questionnaire. Your signature at the end of this consent form indicates that you allow the researcher to transcribe the answers provided in this questionnaire.

If you would like additional information or with any questions or problems that arise during your participation, you may contact Brianna French (805)-746-4868, Student of Child Development at California State University, Chico. Thank you for your cooperation.

First and last name (please print):\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher: Brianna French Date: 12/9/2013

How I Discipline & My Child’s Performance: Parent Questionnaire

**Circle the number that indicates how often you do or feel each statement.**

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

1. How often do you use 0 1 2 3 4

corporal punishment?

2. When my child disobeys 0 1 2 3 4

I use spanking?

3. If my child hits someone 0 1 2 3 4

I use spanking?

4. I use corporal punishment 0 1 2 3 4

to correct my child’s behavior.

5. I feel that I am in complete 0 1 2 3 4

control when disciplining my child.

**Circle agree or disagree based on your feeling from each statement.**

1. My child has good attendance in school. Agree Disagree

2. I am disappointed if my child receives less than an A. Agree Disagree

3. My child is an average student. Agree Disagree

4. My child has behavioral issues at school. Agree Disagree

5. My child looks forward to school. Agree Disagree

Demographic

Finally, we need some basic information about you and your family. **Please circle or fill in the answer that best describes you and your family.**

1. I am a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ a. males b. female
2. I am \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years old

3. My Race/Ethnicity is a. White/ Anglo

b. African American

c. Hispanic

d. other\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (please list)

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING!

When I am in Trouble & My Feelings about School: Child Questionnaire

**Circle the number that indicates how often you do or feel each statement.**

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

1. How often do you get 0 1 2 3 4

spanked by a parent?

2. When I am in trouble 0 1 2 3 4

my parents hit me.

3. When I get spanked the swats 0 1 2 3 4

extremely hard.

4. I am afraid to get spanked. 0 1 2 3 4

5. My parents spank me several 0 1 2 3 4

times in a week.

**Circle agree or disagree based on your feeling from each statement.**

1. I enjoy school. Agree Disagree

2. I fear disappointing my parents. Agree Disagree

3. I have hidden bad reports from my parents. Agree Disagree

4. I usually receive good grades. Agree Disagree

5. When I perform poorly my parents discipline me. Agree Disagree

Demographic

Finally, we need some basic information about you and your family. **Please circle or fill in the answer that best describes you and your family.**

1. I am a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ a. males b. female
2. I am \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years old

3. My Race/Ethnicity is a. White/ Anglo

b. African American

c. Hispanic

d. other\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (please list)

4. My grade in school is a. 5th

b. 6th

c. 7th

d. 8th

e. 9th

f. 10th

g. 11th

h. 12th

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING!